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Remarks by USAID Administrator and Director of U.S. Foreign Assistance Henrietta H. Fore

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Kosovo Donors Conference Brussels July 11, 2008

Mr. Chairman, members of the Government of Kosovo, fellow delegates,

Let me begin by thanking Commissioner Rehn, Director General Leigh, Mr. Mirel and the European Commission staff. The United States greatly appreciates the leadership shown by the Commission with respect to Kosovo over a period of many years.

The United States and EU share a commitment to Kosovo's rapid economic development and regional integration. We share a commitment to make Kosovo's European future a reality.

In addition, I want to thank the World Bank and the IMF for preparing much of the technical work for the conference.

I want to recognize the strong representation of other donor nations and organizations here today. Your presence testifies to the fact that Kosovo merits the attention and support of us all.

But perhaps most importantly, I want to congratulate the Government of Kosovo for the work in preparation for the conference that will ensure that this conference is a success.

I also want to pay tribute to what the people of Kosovo and their government, members of which are with us today, have accomplished more generally. Kosovo has taken important steps to bring together its ethnically divided society.

Over the past few months, the Kosovo Assembly has passed more than 40 laws to implement the provisions of the plan developed by U.N. Special Representative Martti Ahtisaari. Decentralization and protection of minority rights are crucial elements of this legislation. Recent months have seen no major ethnic violence nor outflow of refugees, an important indicator of stability in Kosovo.

The United States commends Kosovo for the restraint it has shown in responding to serious provocations. We are encouraged that some ethnic Serbs continue to in and work with Kosovo government institutions, though further outreach and dialogue is needed.

We who are here today recognize that Kosovo's future development is important to Europe's future. Is Kosovo a good investment? Emphatically, yes! On a recent trip there I saw firsthand what a dramatic impact international assistance has already made.

Donor aid has built roads and schools, strengthened the financial sector, and provided electricity and clean water for citizens throughout this small country. In the north, in Mitrovica internationally-funded projects have brought high school students from ethnic Serb and Albanian backgrounds together and helped them gain job experience.

Other projects have supported the rule of law by providing technical assistance, training and equipment for Kosovo's police force and judiciary and helped municipal governments expand their services to citizens while also increasing their revenues. I was also impressed by the energy and entrepreneurial spirit I encountered from business owners eager to sell everything from vegetable seedlings to furniture.

But we are here today because we recognize that the job is not done, that the people of Kosovo, as eager and

energetic as they are to take responsibility for their own future, realize that they will accomplish more, and more quickly, with further support from the international community.

I appreciate the opportunity to tell you about the United States pledge.

The United States sees a stable, independent, economically viable Kosovo as crucial to stability and progress in the Balkans. Donor support of Kosovo's development needs, along with the maintenance of a sound fiscal and macroeconomic framework, will help lay the foundation for sustainable, job-creating growth.

The U.S. has already spent over \$1.1 billion for Kosovo's development, and we will pledge more today. Our commitment is for the long-term. U.S. assistance will support implementation of the Ahtisaari Plan, helping Kosovo transition from international administration to self-rule. We remain focused on building capacity within Kosovo's nascent institutions.

To that end, the United States is pledging more than \$400 million - \$ 402.9 million, to be precise - in assistance to Kosovo. This total includes funds already appropriated by our Congress, as well as funds requested in the Administration's Fiscal Year 2009 Budget request, submitted to Congress earlier this year.

Let me note that this figure includes only funds going towards needs identified in the Medium Term Expenditure Framework. The U.S. contributions to the EULEX Rule of Law Mission and to the operating costs of the International Civilian Organization, which are also important forms of support for Kosovo, are not part of this sum. The U.S. expects to provide significant levels of assistance in 2010 and 2011 as well. All this would of course not be possible without the United States Congress, where Kosovo has enjoyed bipartisan support in both the Senate and the House of Representatives.

In our view, one of the most valuable ways we can assist Kosovo is to help lift the burden of the external debt it could inherit from Serbia as part of the former Yugoslavia. So debt relief is a significant portion -- \$150 million - of our overall pledge. We strongly encourage other donors to contribute to debt relief as well.

United States assistance to Kosovo aims at other important areas as well. Through programs to advance rule of law, mitigate ethnic conflict, build confidence in government institutions, facilitate reconciliation, foster dialogue, and develop basic police services, we seek to promote peace and security for the people of Kosovo.

Our efforts to build the capacity and efficiency of the justice system and to establish professional independent media are aimed at furthering just and democratic governance in Kosovo. Our projects to improve child health care and strengthen higher education are an investment in Kosovo's most important resource, its people. We also seek to support private enterprise, create jobs, improve the energy and transportation infrastructure, and establish a legal regulatory environment conducive to investment, all of which are essential for Kosovo's economic growth.

We will have a chance to discuss many of these sectors today, and to hear more detail from the Government of Kosovo about its long-term development plans. Among other things, the United States would be interested in hearing from the Government how it is planning for the maintenance of new infrastructure - that is, not just to build new roads and schools, but to maintain them over time.

We also hope that political differences at the local level do not stand in the way of key infrastructure projects that will improve the lives of all Kosovo's citizens.

Today's conference provides a valuable opportunity to strengthen donor coordination. The MTEF provides donors with a very useful framework for focusing on Kosovo's most urgent needs, and when we match up today's pledges with the MTEF, we should be able to see where the most serious gaps remain. Over the next few weeks and months, I trust we will work together as donors and in close coordination with the government of Kosovo to refine and target our respective assistance packages.

In closing, let me repeat my congratulations to the Government of Kosovo for what it has accomplished to date. Kosovo still faces many challenges. Additional international assistance will play a crucial role in helping Kosovo to realize its development goals. But we are here today because Kosovo's success is vital not only to regional stability but also to a larger Europe that is whole, free, and at peace. I thank you for your attention, and I look forward to learning more about other donors' plans. Thank you.

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